



WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH IN ARKANSAS

*From The
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health*



State Profile 2002

*Delivering on the Nation's promise:
Safety and health at work for all people through prevention.*

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

NIOSH is the primary federal agency responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related illness and injury. NIOSH is located in the Department of Health and Human Services in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The NIOSH mission is to provide national and world leadership to prevent work-related illness, injury, disability, and death by gathering information, conducting scientific research, and translating the knowledge gained into products and services. As part of its mission, NIOSH supports programs in every state to improve the health and safety of workers. NIOSH has developed this document to highlight recent NIOSH programs important to workers and employers in Arkansas.

The Burden of Occupational Illness and Injury in Arkansas

- In Arkansas, there are approximately 1.2 million individuals employed in the workforce.¹
- In 2000, 106 workers died as a result of workplace injuries.²
- The transportation and public utilities industry had the highest number of fatalities, followed second by construction, and third by manufacturing.²
- In 1999, the most recent year for which data are available, the rate of fatal workplace injuries was 6.3 deaths per 100,000 workers—above the national average rate of 4.5 deaths per 100,000 workers.²
- In 2000, there were 55,500 nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses in Arkansas.³

The Cost of Occupational Injury and Illness in Arkansas

In 2000, the most recent year for which data are available, a total of \$187.8 million was paid for workers' compensation claims by Arkansas private insurers and self-insured employers.⁴ This figure does not include compensation paid to workers employed by the federal government and also underestimates the total financial burden for private sector businesses, since only a fraction of health care costs and earnings lost through work injuries and illnesses is covered by workers' compensation. Chronic occupational illnesses like cancer are substantially under-reported in workers' compensation systems because work-relatedness is often difficult to establish.

How NIOSH Prevents Worker Injuries and Diseases in Arkansas

Health Hazard Evaluations (HHEs) and Technical Assistance

NIOSH evaluates workplace hazards and recommends solutions when requested by employers, workers, or state or federal agencies. Since 1993, NIOSH has responded to 18 requests for HHEs in Arkansas in a variety of industrial settings, including the following example:

West Helena, Arkansas: Evaluation of Pesticide-Producing Company

In February 1999, NIOSH conducted an HHE at a pesticide-producing facility in West Helena, Arkansas, to address employee concerns about pesticide exposure and reported health problems such as "low blood counts," respiratory problems, visual problems, allergies, and nerve damage. NIOSH investigators did not find any evidence of a health hazard at the facility. Environmental sampling in a packaging room, however, indicated that over-exposure to triphenyltin hydroxide, a fungicide, may occur if appropriate personal protective equipment is not used properly. Recommendations to management included: routinely conducting air sampling in areas where respirators are used and informing workers about how chemicals with which they work may affect their health and how to protect themselves.

Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program

The purpose of the NIOSH Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program is to determine factors that cause or contribute to fire fighter deaths suffered in the line of duty. NIOSH uses data from these investigations to generate fatality investigation reports and a database that guides the development of prevention and intervention activities. Since 1997, there have been four fire fighter fatality investigations in Arkansas, including the following example:

Arkansas: Volunteer Fire Fighter Electrocuted

On November 3, 1999, an 18-year-old volunteer fire fighter was electrocuted after responding to a call involving a brush fire located in a utility easement. The victim and four other fire fighters at the scene noted a tree leaning against the overhead power lines, but saw no downed lines. When the victim was directed to stomp out the embers in a patch of smoldering debris, he came into contact with a downed 7,200-volt power line. To minimize the risk of similar occurrences, fire departments should ensure that fire fighters stay at a safe distance from downed power lines and enforce standard operating procedures, including the use of protective shields or alerting techniques, when working near downed power lines.

Additional information regarding NIOSH services and activities can be accessed through the NIOSH home page at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html> or by calling the NIOSH 800-number at 1-800-356-NIOSH (1-800-356-4674).

¹U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Current Population Survey, 2000.

²DOL, BLS in cooperation with state and federal agencies, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1999-2000.

³DOL, BLS in cooperation with participating state agencies, Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, 2000.

⁴National Academy of Social Insurance, *Workers' Compensation: Benefits, Coverage, and Costs, 2000 New Estimates*, May 2002.

